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Apartheid consciousness in the selected novels of J.M. Coetzee

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J M Coetzee: Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa

The history of South Africa stars more than 100,000 years ago, when the first human inhabited the region. The historical record of this ethnically diverse country is generally divided into four distinct period: the pre-colonial era, the post-colonial and apartheid era. Much of this history, particularly of the colonial and post-colonial eras, is characterised by clashes of culture, violent territorial disputes between European settlers and indigenous people dispossession and repression and other racial political tensions.

The discoveries of diamond and gold in the 19th century had a profound effect on the fortune of the region, propelling it on to the world stage and introducing a shift away from an exclusively agrarian based economy towards industrialisation and development of urban infrastructure. The discoveries also led to new conflict culminating in open warfare between the Boer settlers and imperial Britain, fought essentially for control over the nascent South African mining industry. Following the defeat of the Boers in the Anglo-Boer or South African war (1899-1902), the union of South Africa was created as a dominion of British Empire in terms of the South Africa act 1909, which unified into one entity the four previously separate British colonies: Cape Colony, Natal Colony, Transvaal Colony and Orange River Colony. The country became self-governing nation state within the British Empire in 1934 following enactment of the Status of the Union Act. The dominion came to an end on 31st May 1961 in consequence of a 1960 referendum, which legitimised the country becoming a sovereign state named Republic of South Africa. A republican constitution was adopted.

From 1948 to 1994 South African politics were dominated by Afrikaner nationalism centred around racial segregation and white minority rule known officially as "apartheid" an Afrikaans word meaning "separateness". It was an extension of segregationist legislation enacted prior to the 1934 Union Act. On 27th April 1994, after decade of armed struggle and international opposition to apartheid during which military and political support was provided primarily by the Soviet Union to the non-racial African National Congress (ANC), the ANC achieved victory in the country's first democratic election. Since then the ANC has dominated the politics of the country in an uneasy alliance with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions.

Apartheid Law came to be implemented in 1948 in a comprehensive and calculated manner by the British. Racial discrimination came to be institutionalized. Race laws became an important aspect for an individual's identity and affected every aspect of his socio-cultural life. The law prohibited marriages between nonwhites and whites. In 1950, when the population registration Act was passed, all South Africans were classified into one of three categories: White, Black African, or coloured, and of mixed descent. A 'white person' was obviously defined as a person 'white' in appearance by a majority as a 'white'. However, there was a rider to this. A person could not be considered white if one of his/her parents was nonwhites. The determination that a person was obviously white would take into accounts his habits, education, speech, deportment and demeanour.

A black person would be of or expected to be a member of an African tribe or race and a coloured, someone who is neither black nor white. The Department of Home Africans was responsible for the classification of the citizenry. It was made mandatory for all black to carry passbooks which contained their finger prints, photos and information on access to non-black areas.

Under the apartheid laws, South African blacks were stripped of their citizenship and reduced to a status of citizens of one of ten tribally- based and nominally self-governing Bantustan (tribal homelands). In 1951, the Bantu Authoritative Act established a basis for Ethnic Government. The homelands occupied relatively small and economically unproductive areas of the country. Each African was assigned to a homeland by the government based on his/her origin as per the records available. All the political rights including voting rights held by a black were restricted to the homeland designated for them. The Africans living in the black Homelands required a passport to enter other areas in South Africa. The Government segregated education, medical care and other public services. The black education system within white South Africa was prepared, by design, to restrict the black for lives as a labouring class. There was a deliberate policy of making services for black people inferior to those meant for the whites.

Apartheid (meaning-separateness in Afrikaans, a cognate to English apart and hood) was a system of legalized racial segregation enforced by the National Party Government of South Africa between 1948 and 1994. Apartheid was dismantled after a series of negotiations from1990 to 1993.The legacies of apartheid still shape South African politics and society

The apartheid system is often classified into 'grand apartheid' and 'petty apartheid'. Grand apartheid involved an attempt to partition South Africa into separate states while 'petty apartheid' referred to the segregationist dimension. The National party clung to 'grand apartheid' until 1990s

In 1953, the Public Safety Act and The Criminal Law Amendment were passed. These laws gave the Government more power to declare stringent states of emergency. They also empowered the state to increase penalties for protesting the law. The penalties included fines, imprisonment and whipping. In 1960, a large group of the blacks refused to carry their passes and the Government declared a state of emergency. The whites had no intention of changing the unjust laws of apartheid. The penalty on non-violent protest was severe. Under the emergency laws, anyone could be detained by a low-level police officer and that too without proper legal procedure and imprisoned up to six months. Thousands of individuals died in custody due to the gruesome acts of torture.

Author and literary critic J.M. Coetzee was born in Cape Town, South Africa, in 1949. He published his first novel, "*Dusk lands*" in 1974. In 1984, Coetzee won the Booker Price for "*The Life and Times of Michael K.*". He also published three autobiographical works, "*Boyhood*" (1997), "*Youth*" (2000) and "*Summertime*" (2009). Coetzee won his second Booker Prize in 1999 for *"Disgrace*". In 2003, he won the Noble Prize for Literature. His more recent works include the 2013 novel "*The Childhood of Jesus"*

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J.M. Coetzee is essentially a novelist of the South African reality. He grew up with apartheid and the crimes under the apartheid seeped into his consciousness. His fiction is a visceral attack on apartheid. His major fiction unfolds the racial politics, the new power equations, oppression, exploitation by the state and fundamental questions about an individual's identity and existence in the new socio-political order and an individual's perennial craving for freedom and justice denied by the authority.

The Nobel committee remarked that Coetzee 'who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider'. The committee also remarked that Coetzee is a scrupulous doubter, ruthless in his criticism of the cruel rationalism and cosmetic morality of the western civilization. His intellectual honesty erodes all bases of consolation and distances itself from tawdry drama, remorse and confession. The recurring pattern, we find in his fiction is the downward spiralling journeys, he considers necessary for salvation. It is in exploring weakness and defeat that Coetzee captures the divine spark in man. At the critical moment, the characters stand behind themselves, motionless, incapable of taking part in their own actions. Passivity becomes the last resort open to human beings as they defy an oppressive order by rendering themselves inaccessible to its intention. Coetzee's novels are characterized by their well-crafted compositions, pregnant dialogues and analytical brilliance. The prose of his novels is chaste, graphic with half heard echoes of the master discourses of Beckett, Kafka, Defoe and Shakespeare. The novels open themselves to the application of multiple critical theories and interpretations. The novels, overall, establish themselves in the major European canonical texts of fiction but at the same time they retain the ethical and political concerns of the South African situation with or without making direct references to these.

Coetzee's novels offer us a new approach to the imaginative rewriting of South African history. He maintains a dual commitment to the South African reality and the art of writing. His novels do not attempt to outline history but to dramatise the existence of the troubled dissonance in the society and offer a bleak perspective on the issues of identity and power in the apartheid and post apartheid South Africa. He sees the need for racial harmony to achieve socioeconomic and political balance in the society and this makes him a humanist among other white South African writers. He believes that there are many roles for a writer and he uses allegory as a mode of portraying the concern of the troubled South African reality. His works remind us that oppression, injustice and victimhood are not limited to South Africa but in fact cross-cultural and universal.

South African literature is a literature in bondage, because the problems like homelessness, nameless identity torture and agony are common features. It is less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and torsion of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison.

Power is directly connected to identity in J. M. Coetzee's fiction. Power controls, distorts and marginalizes an individual's identity and the exercise of power leads to new patterns of resistance which is represented in an individual's craving for freedom. The dynamics of identity, power and freedom become the focal point in which an individual confronts his helplessness and he is almost reduced to animal existence, incapable of preserving dignity as an individual in a tyrannical world which is controlled by one form of power or the other.

Thus, the present research proposal concentrates on impact of European Colonialism, African apartheid and the theme of exploitation in selected novel of J.M. Coetzee. **The introductory chapter** introduce the writer's place in South African Literature, impact of African continent, contemporary socio-political situation on his writing. It also includes J.M. Coetzee's point of view on South African Literature. The chapter further explain Coetzee's unique style of depicting allegory, historical perspective and apartheid situation depicted in his literary work.

The second chapter deals with J. M. Coetzee 's introduction to world, his three novels are prominent '*Dusk lands', 'In the Heart of the Country'*, '*Waiting for Barbarians*' reflecting the Apartheid and Colonial phase (1964-1980).
In further discussion '*Dusklands'* has been critically analyses with the colonial and Apartheid perspective.

'Dusklands' open with The Vietnam Project, the first-person narrative of the mental disintegration of Eugene Dawn, a minor functionary in RAND-like Corporation preparing propaganda for use in Vietnam. The second half contains The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee the first-person account of a South African explorer who travels into the interior in 1760 on an elephant hunting expedition, together the two stories explore the common psychology of colonialism and oppression, the dark mentality that inform the United States involvement in Vietnam and Dutch colonization of South Africa. The central story providing coherence in domination and oppression.

E.g. during their narratives, both Dawn and Jacobus physically harm a child, which indicates their disturbed estimation of human life. They are not only unmoved by the physical atrocities performed by their respective colonial power, but also contributed and encouraged violence in the land.

The third chapter deals with '*Waiting for Barbarians'*, Coetzee in the novel is more concerned with a specific issue looming over South African Political life; the question of torture, identity, and violence. The protagonist magistrate's relationship with the "abandoned barbarian girl" he finds himself attracted by her awkward creeping movement and misshapen feet. The connection to the unclean is heightened by her characterisation. Colonel Joll as important character depicted as cruel character with colonial attitude, violence and pro slavery ideology towards tribal community. The colonial is afraid of the barbarian uprising and their resistance too shows vacuum in their heart. The fact that Coetzee ensures that the Empire remains unnamed, the time unspecific, and geography indeterminate indicates that the setting of the novel in tortured, exploited land geography indeterminate indicates that the setting of the novel is tortured, exploited land with the pathetic life colonised people.

The Fourth chapter deals with '*Life and Time of Michael K'*. (1983), it describes the modern South Africa at the time of revolution. The scene of the novel evokes the social break down of post Soweto Africa during the 1980's the novel theme represents the fears and concern s of the time. Michale's life reveals many truths about the oppressive systems of South African life in the evocation of past, the present and the future. Most of Michael's silence occurs when he is confronted by a person who wishes to exercise authority over him. It is reflecting era of Apartheid. The novel is in three parts. In first part Michael K Escapes Cape Town with his mother, intending to take her to the safety of a remote farm where she spent her youth. She dies on the way and K proceeds to the farm with her cremated ashes. He is detained for a time in a labour camp, and then arrives at the farm, located near the town of Prince Albert. He buries his mother's ashes on the farm, taking the earth as his symbolic mother, and begins his life as a vegetable gardener. This existence is disrupted by the arrival of a grandson of the farm owner, who attempts to make K his servant. In the second part K is mistakenly imprisoned and tortured. In third part set in Cape Town in the war ruined land, where again k has been treated as an object of charity and remains alone in the end.

Chapter five deals with '*Foe'* which is retelling of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, a commentary on the art of fiction, and an analogue of South Africa's political and racial dilemmas. The novel is a meditation on how the narration of slavery and colonialism encourage brutality. In the novel Susan Barton is on a quest to find her kidnapped daughter

whom she k has been taken to the New World. She is set adrift during mutiny on a ship to Lisbon. When she comes ashore, she finds Friday and Cruso who have grown complacent, content to forget his past and live his life on the island with Friday-tongue less by what Cruso claims to have been act of former slave owners in attendance. Barton remains at the end before the trio is rescued, but the Cruso does not survive the voyage to England. In England with Friday, Barton attempts to set her adventures on the island to paper, but she feels her efforts lack popular appeal. She tries to convince novelist Daniel Foe to help with her manuscript but he does not agree on which of her adventure is interesting. Barton's story takes a twist with the return of someone claiming to be her missing daughter.

Chapter six deals with '*Disgrace'* is in post-Apartheid phase. It offers a dark depiction of South Africa's transitional phase, since the nightmare of the apartheid the novel portrays politically precarious situation of the whites and blacks and the real race? David Lurie is a South African professor of English who loses everything; his reputation, his job, his peace of minds his dreams of artistic success, and finally even his ability to protect his own daughter. He is twice divorced and dissatisfied with his job as a 'communications' lecturer. His "disgrace" comes when he seduces one of his most vulnerable student, and at the end couldn't able to protect his daughter who undergo in same conditions. Loss of identity, disgrace about humanity, moral values and futile –material life structure, all are depicted in Disgrace with the conviction of impact of Apartheid and Post-Apartheid regime.

Conclusion: The last chapter deals with Coetzee's master contribution to literature and his heroism in narration, plot, association with society, culture and emotions in general.

Survey of Literature:

An observant survey of literature has been done for the research and scope of the topic. There are many research scholars who have studied Post-colonial writing with the help of gender, race, identity, and socio –political approach. This research work focuses upon Apartheid and Post- apartheid situation in colonial countries. It also explores in detail the Apartheid consciousness in J. M. Coetzee's selected novels. This research also aims to study different dimensions of Apartheid law of South Africa and its impact on social and political life of South Africa.

Hypothesis:

The study is an attempt to draw meaning from J. M. Coetzee's writing in comparison with contemporary history and people's life South Africa. It will be a unique experience to see J.M. Coetzee's characterisation, consciousness about Apartheid law. It also critically compares all characters in selected novel with oppressor and oppressed attitude.

Objective of present research work:

1. To explore the fictional and allegorical writing of J.M. Coetzee.
2. To study the characteristic of post colonial writing
3. To reveal crime and socio-political impact of Apartheid act.
4. To know the colonial crime and its remedy for next generation.

Research Methodology:

1. The research work will be based on the critical analysis of Coetzee's selected novels, with the special focus on Apartheid and post apartheid law.
2. The research work will also focus on Coetzee's characterisation, colonial setting, and Post-colonial lost identity and more concern Apartheid law.
3. The M.L.A system of Research Methodology will be followed for the proposed research work.
4. Since the proposed work needs no field work, the texts of selected novels, the reference books, journals, etc will be referred.

Tentative Chapter Scheme:

1. Introduction: African literature and apartheid law
2. Close critical analysis of '*Dusk lands'*
3. Close critical analysis of '*Waiting for Barbarian'*
4. Close critical analysis of '*Life and Time of Michale K*.'
5. Close critical analysis of '*Foe'*
6. Close Critical analysis of '*Disgrace'*
7. Conclusion

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